

Andrew Jackson to Tilghman Ashurst Howard, August 20, 1833, from Correspondence of Andrew Jackson. Edited by John Spencer Bassett.

TO TILGHMAN A. HOWARD.¹

¹ Draft, in the handwriting of F. P. Blair. Howard was district attorney for Indiana 1833–1837.

Rip Raps, August 20, 1833.

Dear Sir. Your letter of the 27th ultimo, reached me at this place a few days ago. I thank you for the kind estimate you have made of my public life. I feel very sensibly, how much I owe to the favor of that public, (which you justly call “the greatest nation of freemen on earth”) for “the last seal of approbation with which it has stamped my career.” The people have over valued my Services, greatly overpaid, in their affectionate and grateful enthusiasm all the labors of my life and have only considered in their recompense, what I have wished to do, not what I have done for my country. The high station to which I have been again called by their suffrages, has no other attractions for me, than as it manifests the approbation of my fellow citizens, and furnishes the opportunity to make some requital by devoting my latest energies, in the endeavor to secure, as far as it is possible for me, their power permanently over their Government. If I can restore to our institutions their primitive simplicity and purity, can only succeed in banishing those extraneous corrupting influences which tend to fasten monopoly and aristocracy on the constitution and to make the Government an engine of oppression to the people instead of the agent of their will, I may then look back to the honors conferred upon me, with feelings of just pride—with the consciousness that they have not been bestowed altogether in vain.

Library of Congress

I look to the overthrow of those systems, (which have been engrafted on our Government to bring in a new and controlling influence, not springing from the popular will,) as the principal means of defeating the machinations of the men, from whom you apprehend future distractions to our country. It is only when they can identify themselves with privileged joint stock Companies, with the Stockholders in a national Bank or the log rolling system of Internal Improvements, Squandering the taxes raised on the whole people, in benefitting particular classes and maintaining a personal influence by partial legislation in congress, that these men have the power to be mischievous. It is immaterial whether artful intriguing and ambitious persons, are enabled, to divert the treasures of a country to the purpose of creating a standing army or of embodying political forces, to act in concert against the unsuspecting undisciplined classes of the community. The *trained Band*, whether of military or political mercenaries, is but too apt to prevail. And whenever polit[i]cal machinery is successfully employed to destroy the great radical principle of freedom—equality among the people in the rights conferred by the Government—then aspiring individuals can avail themselves of the selfish, interested classes to aid in promoting an ambition which is naturally prone to multiply the advantages and increase the strength of the predatory portion of the community. My great hope of avoiding the evils of which you speak, arises from the prospect of being able to restore the equilibrium of the Government; equality in the condition of the people, so far as it depends on legislation.

It will undoubtedly, as you observe, form a part of the policy of the disappointed as well as some of the aspiring politicians “to cut up the party” which has sustained the Administration, by coalitions between distinguished individuals. Creating divisions among the people as to men, is one of the artifices, essential to the success of the *few* over the *many*. It is therefore of the utmost importance, that the majority should adopt some means to prevent such divisions. The Democratic party of Pennsylvania, and of several other states, have adopted the plan of calling Conventions of Delegates, elected by the people themselves and charged with their instructions for the purpose of selecting candidates for important trusts and of thus producing concert among the friends of the

Library of Congress

same principles. This plan has had the most beneficial operation, in preventing distractions among the people of these states in selecting agents to give effect to their wishes, and in maintaining their control in the Government. It strikes me that this is the only mode by which the people, will be able long to retain in their own hands, the election of President and Vice President. It is doubtless, as you say, the design of those who are opposed to the principles and measures of the present administration, to divide the majority supporting it, by dissensions as to individuals and to bring the election of President again into the House of Representatives, in the hope, that it may there be decided by the sinister influences, to which I have already adverted. I trust the good sense of the people will prevent such result; and in reply to your question as to pennsylvania, give it as my impression that she will be among the first states to guard against the effects of divided counsels. She has seen the advantage of her state usages at home, and the disadvantage of a contrary course in relation to the General interests; And with the sound sense and patriotism for which she has been ever distinguished, will act for the common good, upon the conclusions she may draw from that experience.

accept the assurance of my high respect and esteem and my best wishes for your health and prosperity